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BIBLE STUDY IN PREPARATORY SCHOOLS

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In reading the *Biblical World* for September, 1906, the attention of the writer was called to the very able article by Professor Isaac B. Burgess entitled, "Are Courses in the Bible Suited to the Curriculum of a Preparatory School?"

The question is one of vital interest yet of real difficulty. Is it desirable to introduce a new subject into an already overcrowded curriculum? If it is, in what way is the Bible to be taught and what training is necessary for the teacher? These are questions which must be answered satisfactorily before any changes can be made in our courses of secondary study. Perhaps therefore the experience of an eastern school where a course of biblical instruction similar to that in the Morgan Park Academy was introduced three years ago may serve to support the point of view so well defended by Professor Burgess.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the point whether the Bible is or is not an ethical factor in our national life. I assume that it is, and for that reason is of some value in molding the lives of future citizens and law-makers. I do wish, however, to ask where and how this knowledge of the Bible can be obtained. It is no longer possible to say that the Bible is taught at home and therefore can be left out of the schools. We are confronted with the fact that with a few exceptions it is not so taught. It is left therefore for Sunday schools or the secular schools to take up this task.

Sunday schools began in an effort to reclaim children from the streets and to give them the elements of moral instruction. With this was formerly included the elements of secular instruction—reading, writing, and arithmetic. As these were dropped, increased instruction in the Bible took their place. Now in our large city schools we are brought face to face with the problem of how to stem the double tide of ignorance and vice. That the Sunday school

cannot cope with the whole problem is evident. It can teach, aiming only to do the intellectual side of the work well, or, shifting the emphasis and freely adapting the work to individual needs, it can become an instrument of moral influence and good. The methods which should be used are too divergent to admit of being united without the sacrifice of one or the other desired ends. Far be it from us to undervalue the good that the Sunday schools are doing, week by week, or to fail in appreciation of the patient, earnest endeavor which often brings about greater results than we had dared hope for. It is because time and labor are freely given that it becomes worth while to face the problem squarely and to consider how the work can be done most effectively and without waste of strength or effort.

It is not hard to see for one thing that regular systematic teaching in the Sunday school will be difficult to secure. Good teachers, equal in ability to those in secondary schools, are hard to get. The majority of volunteers are untrained in the subject, and frequently unable or unwilling to make their deficiencies good. Again, the conditions surrounding the pupils are unsatisfactory. Great irregularity of attendance prevails; lessons are prepared badly or not at all; the time of day or week is one when the pupils are out from under the general habit of discipline and the result is too often something which would not be tolerated for an instant in a well-regulated school. Steady, consecutive instruction cannot be given under these conditions, but, on the other hand, it is fully possible to use such opportunities to interest, stimulate, and help the average boy or girl if sufficient freedom be allowed in the choice of material. Would it not then be economy of strength and effort to establish in the secondary schools such courses in biblical instruction as seem fitting and leave to the Sunday schools their own proper sphere of moral instruction? That this moral instruction would often include the other goes without saying, but the teacher ought to be able to draw upon knowledge already gained by the children in the secular schools and by this freedom from the entire responsibility be enabled to choose material adapted to his own needs. Ideally speaking, this plan for public instruction would include the public schools. This is not the time or place to raise the vexed question of mixed nationalities and creeds, but only to suggest that the plan followed in

Germany of separate instruction for Protestant, Catholic, and Jew, with equal freedom for each, is open to fewer objections than our own present one which safeguards the religious training of our foreign-born children to the detriment of our own. The private schools are free from such hindrances, and it is for them to take the initiative.

It is pertinent now to ask whether such instruction is possible under the existing conditions of secondary work. The Morgan Park Academy has already answered in the affirmative. Permit me to confirm it with our own experience.

St. Agnes School, Albany, N. Y., is a boarding and day school for girls. The plan of study from the primary class to graduation covers twelve years. The tenth year marks the completion of work not always identical with but fully equivalent to that given in the leading New York high schools. At the close of this year also the college preparatory students go up for their final examinations. The last two years are designed to meet the needs of those who do not wish to go to college but who desire broader and more advanced work than is given in high schools. During each of these two years only four subjects are carried, of which English history and science are required, and the fourth is an elective.

In the fall of 1903 the following plan for Bible study was put into effect. One period a week is given to it by each class from the sixth to the tenth, inclusive. No prepared work is asked, therefore a few minutes from each period is devoted to rapid review, and there are no longer oral and written examinations in the middle and at the close of each semester. The outline of study is as follows:

Fifth year.—In this year the Bible study forms a part of the regular daily work in history, which is a study of ancient nations and especially of the Semitic peoples. Egypt, Assyria, the Arabians, and the Hebrews are treated briefly, and then the *Old Testament Stories* (Moulton) are read and reproduced. Miss Arnold's little book just published, *History of Ancient Peoples*, is also used with great advantage.

Sixth year.—Here Bible study proper begins and is entirely separate from the other departments. The *New Testament Stories* (Moulton) are used, supplemented by questions and references;

each child makes a collection of prints for her notebook and at the end of the year they study the geography of Palestine with sand maps and pictures.

Seventh and eighth years.—In these two years the outlines of Old Testament history are covered. The work in class is done by means of topics, notebooks, lectures, and maps. Kent's *Hebrew People* is most useful for reference work.

Ninth year.—The literature of the Old Testament. As the course of the two previous years is historical, so this is literary. The books are grouped under the headings of history, prophecy, poetry, and "wisdom" books. The general outline of contents, authorship, date, and circumstances of composition are discussed freely. The exceeding richness of imagery, the dignity and power of the prophets, the beauty of the Psalms rarely fail to make a lasting impression.

Tenth year.—The literature of the New Testament. The aim and plan is the same as in the preceding year. Either Bennett and Adeney's *Biblical Introduction* or M'Clymont's *New Testament and Its Writers* is an excellent handbook for this course. In the eleventh and twelfth years no Bible study is required, but Christian ethics is offered as a senior elective. This course meets five periods a week for two years with full amount of prepared work. The course is historical and divides itself broadly into the treatment of the following topics: (1) primitive manners and customs with especial reference to the Semitic; (2) Hebrew ethics; (3) Greek ethics; (4) the Incarnation in its relation to Greek and Hebrew thought; (5) the doctrine of the Kingdom; (6) modern ethics and discussion of practical problems.

Up to the senior work the emphasis is placed on fact as fact, and with careful avoidance of all denominational inferences and attempts at controversy. In the senior elective, denominational issues are still laid aside, but the increased maturity of mind makes it possible to do more thoughtful work of quite a different type. Frank discussions, even lively debates, occur frequently—but the purpose is training in thought and expression, in accuracy, fairness, and honesty, not a dogmatic solution of the question itself. Collateral reading, observation, investigation of some especial problem all serve as means to the same end.

It still remains to answer one reasonable objection which is sometimes raised, namely, that the Bible is cheapened and secularized by this method of study. Whether or not this is so depends on the teacher. Lightness and flippancy in any subject will call forth the same attitude from the class, but it is equally true that sincerity and moral earnestness can create an atmosphere of reverence which is an effective safeguard against the light handling of sacred things. This quality is more desirable in the teacher than mere scholarship and to its absence during these formative years of a child's life much of the present irreligion may be due. The years from twelve to twenty are the years of the greatest religious sensitiveness, also of the greatest doubt. These vague doubts and questionings can be better answered at school by someone who knows the whole drift of the child's mental training than by the vast majority of parents. Care never to raise a doubt, but frank and honest examination of each doubt when presented by the pupil; such correlation with other studies as will lead the mind to find its own answers; suggested reading; above all, the fostering of the habit of mind which patiently holds questions in abeyance and waits for further light—these are the means by which a teacher of Bible study in secondary schools, perhaps more than anyone else, can check the inroads of secularization and doubt.

This leads to the material side of the teacher's equipment. Training in Semitics, and especially in the language and history of the Old and New Testaments, is of undoubted value. It gives a grasp of the subject which can be obtained in no other way. Moreover, the fact that this field of research is taking an important place in our universities does much to draw the older pupils toward it. Failing this *technical* training, it is not impossible to acquire knowledge of the subject sufficient for successful teaching. The Sunday School Commission of New York City has done yeoman service in gathering together material for just this purpose, and the number of books bearing on it multiplies from day to day. Nor may one overlook the archaeological side, which appeals to one of the strongest instincts of childhood. Children are born archaeologists. The training of this instinct is one of the greatest possible aids to enthusiastic Bible study. It is here as everywhere—treat the subject as alive and it will live, as dead and it will soon die.